DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 327 003 EA 022 591

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TITLE Chicago School Reform: Who's the Boss?
PUB DATE Aug 90
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (Los Angeles, CA, August 12-17, 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Responsibility; Citizens Councils; Committees; *Decision Making Skills; Effective Schools Research; Elementary Secondary Education; Group Dynamics; Participative Decision Making; *School Based Management; School Restructuring
IDENTIFIERS *Chicago Public Schools IL

ABSTRACT

Decision-making responsibilities of participants in a school based management program in Chicago (Illinois) are discussed in this report. Tension among the local school board council, principal, and professional personnel advisory committee is examined, with a focus on learning decision making skills. Shared decision-making facilitates school-based management which makes ownership and implementation of decisions made by the whole team doable. A conclusion is that "the boss" in Chicago school reform is not a person but a shared decision-making process, which requires participants to be trained in group dynamics and change agentry. A call is made for training school personnel in these skills so that they may share them with parents and community. (31 references) (LMI)

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CHICAGO SCHOOL REFORM: WHO'S THE BOSS?

A paper developed for the
1990 National Council of Professors of Educational
Administration Summer Conference
At California State University in Los Angeles

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August 1990

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CHICAGO SCHOOL REFORM: WHO'S THE BOSS?

Abstract

The boss is not a person but a skill, i.e., Shared Decision Making, which is difficult to achieve without skills in Group Dynamics and Change Agentry. These skills, mixed synergistically, create School-Based Management.

School-Based Management is instrumental in improving at-risk student attendance, behavior, and achievement at minimal cost. These school improvements were documented in extensive research in the 1970s and 80s and established Effective Schools Strategy as a basis for national school reform.

Stress and conflict occur in the operation of Chicago's School-Based Management councils. In this article education professors are challenged to train school personnel in the mastery of the skills required for School-Based Management. In turn, school personnel are challenged to tutor and mentor parents and community residents in the use of these same skills.

CHICAGO SCHOOL REFORM: WHO'S THE BOSS?

A third wave of school reform began sweeping the United States in 1990. The first wave in the early 1980s concentrated on student and teacher improvement. Coming in the mid-80s, the second wave focused upon principal instructional leadership and the empowerment of teachers and parents (Lewis, 1989). These two waves are fusing into a third wave in the early 90s. The third school reform wave of the 90s is a synergistic wave of Effective Schools Strategy, Shared Decision-Making, School-Based Management, Group Dynamics and Change Agentry. One of the geographic areas in which the third wave is highly visible is Chicago, Illinois.

EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS RESEARCH AND STRATEGY

Effective schools research findings whet appetites of school reformers throughout the United States. During the 1970s and 80s research findings indicated that some at-risk schools used Effective Schools Strategy to improve student attendance, behavior and achievement at minimal costs (Brown, 1990; Comer, 1980; Edmonds, 1979; Goldstein, Lang and Stewart, 1986; Lewis, 1989; Odden and Marsh, 1987). Also during the 1970s business reformers persuaded employers to institute decentralization of decision making and participative management, greatly increasing production (Mali, 1978 and Peters and Waterman, 1982). Success of employers led state legislatures to pressure schools to adopt decentralization and participative management preparatory to implementing Effective Schools Strategy.

In public school vocabulary, decentralization is School-Based

Management and participative management is Shared Decision-Making. School-Based Management is a practice by which schools within a district are allotted funds to purchase supplies, personnel and other services determined by the schools' needs assessment. This practice is in direct contrast to traditional practice which requires central offices to make most purchasing decisions. Shared Decision-Making is a practice of teachers, parents and students giving actual input to administrative decisions. Under school reform, School-Based Management councils and committees composed of administrators, teachers, parents, community residents or business leaders and sometimes students are formed. Decisions made by these groups tend to be carried out more effectively and productively than those made unilaterally by the principal. It is believed that these groups feel empowerment and ownership for joint decisions.

Reformers, employers, state legislatures and communities agree that at-risk schools must be reformed. They are convinced that underachievement, misbehavior and truancy in at-risk schools contribute to gangs, crime, drug and alcohol abuse, AIDS, teenage pregnancy, poverty, welfare, dropout, and a weakened capability to compete in world economics and politics. Unfortunately, schools appear to be more a part of the problem than a part of the solution.

In order to make schools a part of the solution, reformers have sought to introduce and implement Effective School Strategy. Earlier strategies in the 80s concentrated on teacher and student improvement. In the mid-80s the emphases were instructional leadership of the principal, and teacher and parent empowerment through School-Based Management and Shared Decision-Making.

Additionally, schools should build upon a curriculum base such as the Seven Cardinal Principles of Education and the management base of the Evaluative Criteria of regional accrediting associations. However, these bases are not enough. Other ingredients required in the recipe of Effective School Strategy are:

- Vigorous principal leadership.
- Staff belief that all children can learn.
- High level of parent involvement.
- High level of student and teacher attendance.
- High academic priority.
- Maximum time devoted to academic tasks.
- High expectation of student achievement by principal, teachers, parents and students.
- Orderly, safe and clean school environment and climate.
- Frequent evaluation and feedback to school community.
- Meaningful in-service always tied to school goals.
- Clear vision of school and community mission by all school community members.
- Trust and consensus among school community members.
- Cooperation with central office.
- High teacher performance ratings.
- High parent and student satisfaction.

(Brown, 1990; Comer, 1988; Edmonds, 1979; and Goldstein, Lang and Stewart, 1986)

School-based management councils have been mandated by state law in more than 75 percent of the United States (Lewis, 1989). Illinois passed its first school reform act in 1985. The act established

Local School Improvement Councils (LSIC) in schools throughout the state. The LSICs are advisory to the principal. But a more powerfully drastic second act in 1988 established councils in Chicago that have power to hire and fire principals.

CHICAGO'S FIRST YEAR OF SCHOOL-BASED MANAGEMENT

In the 1988 school reform act, Illinois mandated the formation of parent majority School-Based Management councils in all 541 of Chicago's schools (Illinois PA 85-1418). These councils, called Local School Councils (LSC), were formed to address the difficult problems of at-risk students and at-risk schools. The council members include the principal, six parents elected by parents, two community residents elected by community residents, and two teachers elected by school staff.

The Chicago LSCs are elected every two years and serve as mini boards of education for each of the City's 541 schools. The LSC responsibilities include: granting of 4 year contract to principal; approval of School Improvement Plan (SIP) and budget developed by the principal; monitoring principal's implementation of the SIP and budget; evaluating principal's performance; and renewing or not renewing the principal's contract.

The principal serves much like a superintendent on a four-year contract. The Principal's responsibilities include: hiring, training and retaining academic personnel on the basis of merit as well as seniority; remediating poorly performing personnel and terminating the unremediated; monitoring the work of the engineer-custodian and lunchroom manager; developing and implementing the SIP and budget ex-

penditures; and serving as executive director/secretary to the LSC and chief executive officer (CEO) to the school.

A Professional Personnel Advisory Committee (PPAC), elected annually by each schools' staff, serves as internal consultants. PPAC responsibilities include: identification of activities and tasks that serve to meet the objectives described in the school's SIP; identify problems that may interfere with the SIP objectives; and investigate and research data needed to advise principal and LSC during approval and implementation of the SIP and budget.

The SIP focuses upon the goals of improving student achievement, attendance and graduation. Specific measurable objectives to be achieved during the period 1989 to 1994 are as follows:

- Average daily attendance rate to increase by 1 percent annually.
- High school graduation rate to improve by 5 percent annually.
- Failure and dropout rates to decrease by 10 percent.
- Fifty percent of all students is to achieve at or above the national norm on standardized tests.

During the authors conduct of training and technical assistance to over a dozen Chicago schools, he found in every situation a natural tension and stress among members of the LSC, PPAC and the principal. The unanswered question which underlies the tension of Chicago's school reform seemed to be "Who's the boss?" Many councils pressed for training in order to operate as boss. Principals moved slowly, covered their posteriors, and performed only what they were asked to perform by the LSC in an effort to retain their powers. The PPACs

convened by the principals for their organizational meeting, often met only once or twice afterwards and performed no meaningful tasks during the first year. Most school reform efforts were carried out with little or no input from its teaching staff. However, teacher members of LSCs exerted some limited leadership.

TRAININGS NEEDED IN GROUP DYNAMICS AND CHANGE AGENTRY

The answer to the question "Who's the boss?" is not a person but a process, the process of Shared Decision-Making. The team that should share in decision making in Chicago is the principal, LSC and PTAC.

Because the boss or leader is a process, team members must learn the processing skills of Group Dynamics and Change Agentry. These learnings and skills include:

- Mutual support and trust.
- Open and honest communication.
- Acceptance of goals through consensus.
- Provision of opportunity to express perceptions and feelings.
- Group building.
- Prevention of disruption by hidden agenda.
- Development of leadership competencies.
- Ability to acquire needed resources.
- Shared decision-making.
- Brainstorming.
- Ability to encourage leadership development within the group.
- Ability to satisfy needs of group members.
- Use of evaluation and feedback to stay "on task."

- Ability to enhance the full potential capabilities of all group members.

Maximum levels of trust and consensus building can be developed if the principal, LSC and SDC are trained in a single group. Supervisors of education have a new opportunity to give training and technical assistance to these groups. These groups require and desire training in the mastery of their new roles.

CONCLUSION

In summation, the answer to the question "Who's the boss?" in Chicago's school reform is not a person but a process, the process of Shared Decision-Making. Shared Decision-Making facilitates School-Based Management which makes ownership and implementation of decisions made by the whole team doable. It will take doable implemented decisions to produce Effective School Strategy. Without the ingredients of Effective School Strategy it is not likely that reforms will be successfully implemented in Chicago. The task that administrators might take ownership for is that of educating school personnel in skills of Group Dynamics and Change Agentry so that school personnel in turn can educate parents in Effective School Strategy, Shared Decision-Making, School-Based Management, Group Dynamics and Change Agentry and above all the parents role in the use of these new learnings and skills.

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